

# ANEMIA, FOLIC-ACID DEFICIENCY



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Anemia caused by a deficiency of folic acid. It is often accompanied by iron-deficiency anemia.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Fatigue and weakness.
- Red, sore tongue.
- Paleness.
- Shortness of breath.
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (rare).

### CAUSES

- Complication of pregnancy, when the body needs 8 times more folic acid than usual.
- Inadequate intake or absorption of foods with a high folic-acid content, such as meat, poultry, fish, cheese, milk, eggs, green vegetables, yeast and mushrooms.
- Alcoholism.
- Overcooking foods, which destroys folic acid.
- Deficiency of vitamin B-12 or vitamin C.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Adults over 60, especially those who have poor nutrition.
- Pregnancy.
- Illness, such as tropical sprue, psoriasis, acne rosacea, eczema or dermatitis herpetiformis.
- Fad diets or general poor nutrition, especially vitamin-C deficiency.
- Surgical removal of the stomach.
- Smoking, which decreases vitamin C absorption. Vitamin C is necessary for folic-acid absorption.
- Use of certain drugs, such as oral contraceptives, anti-convulsants, methotrexate, triamterene or sulfasalazine.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't drink alcohol.
- Have regular medical checkups during pregnancy. Take prenatal vitamin supplements, if they are prescribed.
- Eat well. Include fresh vegetables, meat and other animal proteins. Avoid fad diets. Don't overcook food.
- Don't smoke. Smoking increases vitamin requirements.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in 3 weeks with an adequate folic-acid intake.

## POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Infertility.
- Increased susceptibility to infection.
- Congestive heart failure (severe cases only).
- Folic-acid deficiency can also increase the risk for conceiving a child with a neural tube defect.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory blood studies, a Schilling test to measure vitamin B-12 levels and a therapeutic trial of vitamin B-12.
- Treatment consists mainly of folic acid supplements and elimination of contributing causes.
- If you smoke, stop smoking.
- If you take oral contraceptives, consider using another form of contraception.

### MEDICATIONS

- Folic-acid supplements.
- Iron supplements to take orally.

### ACTIVITY

Anemia does cause fatigue. Schedule regular rest periods until you are able to resume normal activity.

### DIET

No special diet. Eat foods daily that are high in folic acid. The liver can store folic acid for a limited time only. Foods include asparagus spears, beef liver, broccoli spears, collards (cooked), mushrooms, oatmeal, peanut butter, red beans, and wheat germ.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of anemia.
- Symptoms don't improve in 2 weeks, despite treatment.
- Symptoms of infection (fever, chills and muscle aches) occur during treatment.